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# AFFAIRS OF THE WORLD

BY WILLIS FLETCHER JOHNSON

THREE points of the American attitude toward the Genoa Conference are salient and approved. They are also characteristic of American foreign policy in its best estate. The first is, of course, deliberation—which is a very different thing from hesitation—over the question whether we should or should not take part in the gathering. One of the most offensive pretensions ever made by the last German Emperor was that he was entitled to a voice in any conference of nations that should be held on any subject in any part of the world. It would be most regrettable for the United States to assume either that it had a right to intrude into any council of Powers which it pleased to enter or that it was under the compulsion of duty to enter every one into which it was invited. The true course is to shape action according to the special circumstances of each case. A second point was the inadvisability of convening the Genoa Conference—certainly, the very marked undesirability of our participation in it—until the business of the Washington Conference was substantially determined. The old folk-saying, about having too many irons in the fire, is as pertinent and as profitable in national and international as in individual affairs. But the Washington Conference is now triumphantly concluded, and its extraordinarily valuable results will doubtless be speedily confirmed by ratification, wherefore that point, strong as it was, now becomes negligible. The third point was our disinclination to enter a conference into which Soviet Russia was unconditionally received as a member. It is a sound principle, as old as our constitutional Government itself, that recognition of foreign governments is a matter for our own exclusive discretion and will, and to be determined according to the merits of each applicant. It would be intolerable to be inveigled, against our will, into recognition of an unacceptable or unworthy Government, through needless participation in an alien conclave.

The eagerness of Soviet Russia to go to Genoa is self-explanatory. In addition to securing for the Oligarchy international recognition, it will afford it—or so the Triumvirs appear to imagine—an opportunity to balance financial accounts with the creditors of the former Empire. The scheme became obvious, to all who had eyes to see, some time ago, when it was announced at Moscow with a great flourish of trumpets that the Soviet Government had recanted its repudiation of the Russian railroad and other public debts, and meant to pay them. Now we are told that while it will recognize the validity of those debts and its obligation to pay them, it will offset them with counterclaims for still greater amounts, chiefly against the creditor nations, so as to show a substantial balance in its own favor. It will contend that France and the other Allied and Associated Powers either participated in or at any rate encouraged all the numerous wars and insurrections that have been waged against Bolshevism, from the Baltic to the Pacific, and that they are therefore responsible for all the losses, damages and expenses that have thus been caused to the Soviet Government. A fine touch of unconscious humor is added to this preposterous claim by its reference to the precedent set by the United States in demanding “indirect damages” from Great Britain at the close of the Civil War. Of course, as everybody save Mr. Braunstein of The Bronx is expected to know, the precedent then set was exactly the opposite of what is now pretended. The arbitrators at Geneva, at America’s own initiative, unanimously decided that such a claim for “indirect damages” had no warrant in international law and was not to be considered by the Tribunal.

Germany has renewed, with reduplicated vociferation, her professions of poverty and her plea for abatement of the just demands for reparation on the ground of *non possumus*. At the same time her great industrial and commercial establishments are declaring large dividends and enormously increasing their capital stock, and new capital is easily found for all sorts of enterprises; while the tax rate remains not half as high as that of France. It is not so surprising that Germany thus readapts her famous military device of more than a century ago as it is that the trick is not uni-

versally and instantaneously recognized. When in 1806 Prussia was forbidden by Napoleon to maintain a standing army larger than a specified number, Stein and Hardenberg resorted to the system which was ever afterward practised and which became general among all the military powers. That was, to recruit the army for only so long a time as it required to make the men trained and efficient soldiers, and then to send them back to civil life and similarly train another set of men; so that presently all the able-bodied men of the nation were ready for instant service. The result was that by 1810, while the actual army was within the prescribed limit, the potential army was many times larger. So to-day, by refusing to tax the people, Germany remains officially poor and unable to pay her debts, while in fact the nation is accumulating vast wealth, to be placed at the Government's disposal in case of opportunity or need. A plea of poverty by the Government of a rich nation should not deceive the world.

The world-wide gratification over the amicable and equitable readjustment of Anglo-Irish relations has been slightly marred by the course of Mr. De Valera and his associates in holding in Paris a so-called "All-Irish Convention", ostensibly composed of representatives of the Irish race from all parts of the world, and intended to promote the cause of complete separation of Ireland from the British Empire. It is fitting and indeed desirable that there should be an Opposition party in Irish Free State politics; and it is not surprising nor unlawful that there should be a faction dissatisfied with the constitution of the Free State and desirous of replacing it with an entirely independent status. And it is assuredly opportune that all who are interested in the welfare of Ireland should join in council for its promotion. But it cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the only fitting place for such a conference is in Ireland itself, where of course it could be held as freely as in Paris or New York, and that its agenda should contemplate political or other action in Ireland alone. There may have been a time when it was necessary for campaigns for the reformation of Irish affairs to be conducted chiefly in other countries; but that time assuredly ended in the moment when the Dail Eireann ratified the treaty which Arthur Griffith and

Michael Collins had signed in London. There never was a time when it was proper for Irish affairs to be injected as an issue into the politics of any other country. If Mr. De Valera and his friends elect to be hostile to the Free State, that is their right, though we must regard them as lamentably mistaken. But they have no right to make France or America or any other foreign soil the battle-ground of their campaign. The adoption of such a course would do them far more harm than it would do the promising Free State against which it was directed.

We should not say upon the death of Lord Bryce what he, speaking from a heart rent with personal grief, said at the death of Gladstone, "The light has died out of the sky." It is true that the removal of such a personality from the world means immeasurable loss. We are not sure, with all due reverence to the fame of his great colleague, that his own lustre in the world's sky was not of the two the more serene and constant, the more vivifying and beneficent. But his light was so pure, so vivid, and so rich in spectrum as to be not only one of the foremost for sheer illumination but also unsurpassed if not unapproached in those actinic qualities, both moral and intellectual, which made an indelible and perpetual impress upon the world. As a political philosopher he was supreme, equally when in youth he was the critical annalist of that Holy Roman Empire which was neither Holy nor Roman nor yet an Empire, and when as an octogenarian he was analyzing the newest of the world's Republics. As a statesman and diplomat he contributed more than most of his contemporaries to the welfare of his own country and to the sweetening of its relationships with others. As a writer of "English undefiled" he was a joy to all capable of appreciating noble literature. As an educator, even in the technical sense of the word, he ranked among the commanding figures of his time. As a naturalist and explorer he made his holiday avocations of greater account than many men's serious business. As humanitarian and world-patriot his was one of the most fearless and compelling voices raised against the Hunnish infamies of the World War. Such a light as his can never die out of the world's sky. Its impress can never fade from the world's brain and heart.

The reign of Pope Benedict XV began almost coincidently with the World War, and ended while the settlements attendant upon that conflict were still far from complete; and it was necessarily much influenced and colored, in some respects stimulated and in others hampered and circumscribed, by those tragic conditions. History will record that he bore himself in respect to that conflict with discretion, dignity, and the spirit at once of an international Christian statesman and an Italian patriot. His detestation of the crimes of Germany was unfeigned and outspoken; and his repeated efforts for peace were as sincere as they were fruitless. The three great achievements of his reign were not directly connected with the War, though undoubtedly the circumstances created by it facilitated their execution. Despite the fact that two successive Premiers of France had been conspicuous opponents of Clericalism, he greatly improved political relations with that country and secured restoration of its diplomatic representation at the Vatican. His course during the War naturally—we might say, inevitably—led to more friendly relations with the Italian Government. Finally, though at first rejected by Mr. De Valera and his followers, in the last weeks of his life he had the immeasurable satisfaction of casting the decisive influence in favor of peace in Ireland and the establishment of the Free State. Although he was not generally regarded as so great a statesman or a Churchman as some of his predecessors, there were few of them who left a better record of things done for the strengthening of the Papacy and for the general good of the world.

The announcement of the issue of a revised French dictionary by the French Academy renews the feeling of need of a comparable linguistic authority in America, if not, preferably, for the whole English-speaking world. France stands unique among the nations in having such an official guardian and censor of her language, and to that fact we must attribute no small part of the exquisite quality of French literature and of the world-wide esteem in which the language is held. The English language has at least equally noble traditions, and it has a far more copious vocabulary and a wider usage. Moreover, it is, because of its

very nature, far more susceptible to abuse and perversion than French or, indeed, any other tongue. That it should have no fixed, recognized and authoritative standard, of orthography, etymology, syntax, and definition, is a deplorable anomaly. England has, indeed, the great Oxford Dictionary, which is now practically complete. But it, fine as it is, fails hopelessly to equal the service of the French Academy, in three major respects. One is, that it is exclusively English, and is not acceptable in the other half of the English-speaking world, where material differences in linguistic usage have long been established. Another is that even in England it has no official authority, but may be disregarded by anyone at will without the incurrance of any reproach. The third and perhaps most important is that it offers no continuing, current and incessant authority and guide for the necessary additions which are being made to the language. Work on it was begun, alphabetically, in 1879. In the forty-three years since hundreds, perhaps thousands, of new words have been coined, or new uses have been given to old words, to serve the needs of new inventions and the progress of human thought and knowledge. It is almost certain that many of these came too late for inclusion in alphabetical order in the dictionary, and are not to be found in it; while of course the new words and uses which will be made this year and the next and the next will lack even the shadow of its authority. What is needed, what we need in this country, not only for the sake of literature but also for the convenience, utility and efficiency of business correspondence and social speech, is a commanding authority, constantly at work, to prescribe the making of new words and new uses and the changes which are often necessary in a living, growing language, so as to assure uniformity of usage and unmistakable accuracy of expression. We have a Government Board of Geographic Names, which has done much good work. It ought to be possible to create an academic board of rank so commanding that it would be able to do a similar work for the whole language.